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Women involved in children's education

I suggested the topic of women educating children because I hoped to hear stories, ideas and wisdom from other women to help me in what I perceive to be an awesome responsibility and a great joy. The articles you will read in this issue certainly fulfilled my hope. Corresponding with each of these women added a richness and texture to my own life that I'm going to miss but that you can now savor.

Captured heart

My first child, Ryan, was born when I was 34 years old following years of testing and frustration with infertility. I had been a trained teacher and professional counselor for 10 years and had every intention of remaining employed in this capacity. But I became overwhelmed by an emotional tornado that took me totally by surprise. This little child changed my life! My heart was seized by those tiny hands, that cherub mouth and those deep pools of love called eyes. My captured heart became constricted whenever

I was separated far or long from him. What a wonderful plan the Creator had for the relationship between mother and child!

Needless to say, I wanted to stay home with him. My husband, Doug, and I decided to simplify our lives. He would earn the money and I would stay at home as long as God saw fit. Our son, Lee, joined our family when I was 37, and our daughter, Amy, completed our family four years ago when I was 42.

Losing control

With each year and each child my commitment to seeing them grow as confident, capable, loving and inter-dependent Christians also grew. Doug and I had some level of control over how this happened as long as they were at home. But once they began school (then sleepovers, organized sports and other activities outside our home) we no longer were the full-time caretakers of our children's education (in the broadest sense of the word). We had to begin to trust God that as we entrusted our children to other people they would be impacted and nurtured as our prayers pleaded they would be.

Holy Spirit in control

Women have been, in the greatest majority, the teachers of our children: The first Sunday School teacher, Noreen Smith, who instilled an excitement about all Jesus has for each person who loves and follows Him; the Junior High youth leader, Lois Lea, who challenged young people to practice what they learned about God's will for their lives; the preschool teacher, Mrs. Giddens, who valued Amy's assertiveness as "a wonderful ability to lead others"; the grade six teacher, Mrs. Nickerson, who encouraged Ryan's offbeat sense of humor and frequently asked for his input because "he is quite knowledgeable"; the grade one teacher, Mrs. Rogers, who told Lee he was "the best printer in the class"; my friend, Debi Cowan, who loved to share her enthusiasm for her international seashell collection with Amy and Ryan; the baby sitter, Karen Clarke, who told my children that they were her favorite kids to baby-sit



because they were so nice to each other; and the neighbor, Marie Markussen, who asked Amy to visit her any time because she enjoyed her company.

All of these women and many more have been involved in educating my children. Their impact brings a richness to my children's lives that goes beyond what I could have imagined but is just what God knows that they need. I have learned to pray and rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to be in control of the things I cannot control as I have released my children into the world.

Edification or demolition

Just as these women have "educated" my children, so have I had the privilege to be an "educator." Like many of you, I am a mother, sister, neighbor, teacher, friend, worship leader and church member, and, as such, I touch the lives of children. Each contact can be edification or demolition. Each contact can help that child discover or affirm something about herself or his world. Each contact is part of our involvement in children's education.

Living Christ's love

Women in the Mennonite church are hearing the words of Jesus: "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (Matthew 19:14). As the Body of Christ, these women are living Christ's love into the lives of children.

In this issue, Lorie Preheim transports us to the streets of Santa Cruz, Bolivia, where we see her concern for the education of the street children. Amy Dueckman talks about helping her children become lifelong learners. Irma Penner tells us about her book that captures the story of her struggle to integrate her daughter into a mainstream class. Marilou Adams enthusiastically proclaims that "reading is everything" then, shares the joy it has brought to her life. Marsha McDonald explores the challenge of seeing her child "through God's eyes." Katie Mumper, 13 years old, gives us a glimpse into two educational approaches and the effect of her mother and other female teachers on the course her life.

As you read this issue and hear the passion with which each woman shares her heart for a child or a group of children, open your heart to receive the message of how important you are to each child you touch.

Rosemary McDonald, compiler of this issue, is the Chairperson of MCC Canada's Committee on Women's Concerns. She holds a master's degree in educational psychology. She is the mother of three children, wife of Doug Vicars and a member of Cornerstone Community Church (Mennonite Brethren) in Dartmouth, NS.





"I believed that Yvonne's life was as of equal worth as others; I believed then (and still do) that all people are created in the image of God."

by Rosemary McDonald

The right to belong: **Interview with Irma Penner,** **author**

*Irma, can you tell me a little about your children and what prompted you to begin the journey that is chronicled in your book, *The Right to Belong: The Story of Yvonne*?*

We have two daughters, Teresa and Yvonne. Teresa, who is four years older than Yvonne, was accepted into the school system. Yvonne, however, was not. Yvonne has a developmental disability (Rett Syndrome). In 1972, doctors labeled her "retarded," and this closed doors to her participation in school. As a mother I love Yvonne—as I love Teresa—and from the beginning Yvonne was very much a part of our family. To me it was only natural that she should be included in the community, as any other child. I believed that Yvonne's life was as of equal worth to others; I believed then (and still do) that all people are created in the image of God. This gave me the determination and perseverance to advocate for Yvonne's right to belong. Scripture shows us Jesus' compassion to those who were blind and mute. Did Jesus not want them to be a part of the community?

My values and views, however, were not accepted by some professionals and educators. So I had a twofold challenge: With the help of family and friends I needed to meet Yvonne's needs, and I also needed to show professionals that despite Yvonne's limitations she would benefit from being included, and others would benefit too.

What happened?

Year after year, I placed phone calls, wrote letters and asked for meetings as I strove to have Yvonne included in school. The gains with the education system were slow. Yvonne's schooling began in a church basement, then moved to a segregated school, followed by a separate class in a regular school. Finally, at age 15, (even though she couldn't speak, read or write, and needed one-on-one attendant assistance), Yvonne was enrolled in a regular grade 8 class!

What was the reaction?

Two incidents illustrate other students' reactions to Yvonne's participation:

John was "bully of the class" and often was expelled because of his behavior. As an April Fools joke, he covered the teacher's chair with chalk dust. The teacher noticed, however, and waited until he left the room, then switched her chair with his. When John returned and was about to sit, the teacher called out to him, yet it was too late. He sat. The class laughed hysterically; the joke was on John. Yvonne, however, cried. Throughout the day when students or staff retold this incident, Yvonne cried; she was sensitive to people laughing at others.

The following day, when we dropped Yvonne off at school where Karen, her assistant, waited, a tall, broad-shouldered guy stepped up to Yvonne and helped her, walking at her elbow. She looked up at him and smiled. Together they walked up the steps. Karen looked at us, shrugged her shoulders and followed them. Our curiosity had to wait until the end of the day.

"Who was that this morning?" I asked when we arrived at school.

"That was John," Karen replied.

"John, the guy with the April Fools joke?" Smiling, she nodded.

In the days that followed, Karen told us how John was helping Yvonne. "You know," she said, "the kids in the class have even commented he is less of a bully."

Karen tells about another classmate of Yvonne's: "During lunch Trevor said he always thought that people like Yvonne were different and couldn't learn anything. He has since changed his mind. He said she is just like everyone else, and she's cool."

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by Lorie Preheim

Changing attitudes about learning in Bolivia

I drive up on my motorcycle to a congested street corner in the city of Santa Cruz, Bolivia. “Lorie, Lorie, Lorie,” yell the kids as they hop off the hoods of cars where they are washing windshields. Nine bright-eyed children come running up to greet me with high fives, “Joe Cool” handshakes, slaps on the back, hugs and the biggest smiles you’ve ever seen. Playfully, 10-year-old Joselito washes the front of my helmet with his squeegee as if it were the windshield of a car. Miguel Angel honks the horn repeatedly while I chat with the kids. Luis and Alfredo hop on the back of the cycle and beg me to take them for a ride. And I feel good and think, “This is why I work with these kids. They may be a pain in the butt sometimes, but you gotta’ love them.”

“Hey fellas, what’s up?” I say. “You all making some big bucks today?” A 16-year-old who has been washing windows for two years, grins at me from the curb where he’s resting out of the scorching sun. His real name is Boni Pedro Chavez, but the kids all call him Pateche (meaning crooked. Boni Pedro’s spinal cord is bent to one side, his one shoulder is dropped and he walks with a limp.) He permanently maimed his foot in a bicycle accident.

Recently, the kids from our program participated in a march to raise awareness of children’s rights. Boni Pedro represented our program during a press conference in front of the capital buildings. In his speech he said, “Our parents do not have a profession because they didn’t have the opportunity to study. My father told me that studying is only for rich people. Today, nothing has changed. There are some high schools for the rich and other ones for the poor. The best teachers and supplies go the private schools.”

And Yvonne?

People have asked me, “How does Yvonne feel about being in a regular class?”

“Her bright eyes and dimpled smile tell the story,” I said and showed them Yvonne’s school picture which I carry in my wallet. This has become a treasured picture. It is on the cover of my book.

How did you keep up this battle for your daughter for so long?

Throughout my struggles to have Yvonne accepted in the community and school I relied on prayer—especially when some people deliberately attempted to exclude her. When Yvonne was eventually integrated, a few people voiced surprise. But I wasn’t surprised; God had made this possible. I was thankful and grateful for the prayers of family and friends.

Irma Penner’s book, The Right to Belong, The Story of Yvonne, is available from the author at 215 Beaconsfield Street Fredericton, NB, E3B 5H6. (1997, self-published, \$16.00) ipenner@nb.sympatico.ca

"Boni Pedro wants to get his high school diploma. He says, 'I want to become a lawyer or bank teller because my parents are waiting for me to do something with my life.' "

Boni Pedro wants to get his high school diploma. He says, "I want to become a lawyer or bank teller because my parents are waiting for me to do something with my life." His father is 72 and has 10 kids. He clears jungle plots of brush and trees, which means he spends little time in the city with his family. His mother washes clothes from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. Boni Pedro decided on his own to go to work to help support the family.

Boni may have trouble meeting his goal. This year he failed his classes and has to repeat the year. He says, "I feel really bad about failing. My parents did not like it. This year I'm going to work less on the street. If I hadn't been working I wouldn't have failed. There wasn't time to study, and I missed a lot of classes." Boni Pedro seems to be truly interested in making a change. During his summer vacation he's been attending our math and language classes to catch up. He even asked that we meet more often so he could get more help.

Back in the street, Miguel cranks the gas on my motorcycle. I learned early on to always have the breaks on when stopped. "Elvio, Juan Carlos, Pipi, Boni Pedro, come on, let's go!" I call. "I've got this great math game I want to teach you. Ya'll are gonna love it." So, we head off to MCC where my Bolivian co-workers and I teach two or three classes simultaneously in one small room.

I sit down with seven 8- to 12-year-olds at a little square table while my co-worker, Eliana, works with the older kids seven feet from us. After two turns playing the math game, Elvio gets bored waiting for his turn and runs over to the other table to see what they're doing in the writing class, Juan Carlos stands up in his seat and pokes his head out the window to see the kids playing outside on the jungle gym, and Pipi pinches the kid sitting next to him.

Keeping the attention of these kids is no easy task. When planning lessons, I have to think very carefully about what I'm going to do and how to make it successful. The activity has to be fun and capture their attention. Any down time, and we lose them. It has to be simple or they get frustrated, but not too easy or they say, "Bah, I already know this. This is for wusses." It has to be new; any repetition and they say, "Ahhh, we've done this already" and run off to play.

More than once, class has been going well, and in one instant—a co-worker comes to ask me a lengthy question, I get up to break up a fight or deal with some disturbance, a bunch of kids shows up late, or one kid decides he doesn't like the activity—and poof, my class dissipates in a fraction of a second. I'm left saying, "Wait, come back." But it's futile. The inertia has swept off in a different direction, and I'm left open-mouthed and frustrated. How can I meet all the needs at once? How can I make this work? I rather like my co-workers suggestion of duplicating myself—fivefold might work! Most of the time it feels like the odds are against me.

But then Santi walks in the room, "Looooooooorie, let's play that one math game, please, please, please." So, he and I sit down and play math Bingo, the one game he just can't get enough of. Five minutes later, a few more little ones waltz in, "Can I play, can I play?" and the inertia



"This is what makes us different from state-run programs. The spirit, commitment and manner of interacting is different, and the people who need it the most feel that difference."

has swung back my way—not the way I had planned, not the lesson I had planned, but nonetheless the ball's in my court again.

My goal in education is not only to teach basic skills but to change people's attitudes about learning and about themselves. I want them to feel good about what they know already, what they're learning, and what they will learn in the future. Although I am certified to teach in public schools, I feel more of a calling to teach marginal populations in nontraditional/informal settings. I like working with people who have struggled or have had a bad experience in school, people who have fallen behind and who perhaps have low self-esteem about their learning capacity, people who want and need more individual attention.

Teachers in our programs are there not just to teach reading, writing and math. We are there to build relationships and to think about the whole person: emotionally, physically and spiritually. We model Christ's love and acceptance for all. People feel this caring and embrace and are drawn to the programs, not just for learning, but also for support and friendship. This is what makes us different from state-run programs. The spirit, commitment, and manner of interacting is different, and the people who need it the most feel that difference.

Since I am a American Mennonite woman working with Bolivian boys who work in the streets, we have some pretty big differences in our backgrounds. The boys seem to accept and seek out a lot more hugs, attention, and affirmation from me as a woman than they might from my male counterparts. For the most part, it works to my advantage because it definitely piques their curiosity.

Lorie Preheim works in an MCC program called PRONATs for children and youth who work in the streets of Santa Cruz, Bolivia. She is a graduate of Bethel College. She served as a volunteer with Mennonite Board of Missions for three years. Her church is New Community Church in Washington, D.C.



by Marsha McDonald

Through God's Eyes

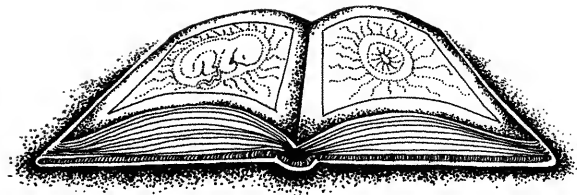
This article has been difficult to write. Committing thoughts and feelings to paper requires clarity and when considering a problem about your own child, clarity is not always welcome. The danger stems from the fact that clarity may lead to closure, and my "problem child" may be diminished forever by some label. Perhaps others will view him differently . . . perhaps his self-image will suffer or perhaps I will lose hope for his future. But no, my hope is in the Lord and my confidence now in writing is gained from reflecting on how He has shown grace and mercy to me over the last 20 years.

I was quite unprepared to be a mother when I had my first child at age 21. I was determined that my young marriage was going to offer a refuge from a troubled family life. As each new crisis emerged, I had no mother to turn to for advice. I have vivid memories of frantic searches through a dog-eared copy of Dr. Spock's book when I sat with my sick child, worried and alone. My faith in God lay dormant, so I had no spiritual reference point to lead me through hard times in a large strange city.

Now as I look back, I see how faithful the Lord was to me as He continued to pursue me and draw me to Himself once more. I have been blessed with four children: four unique, beautiful, precious lives.

I remember clearly my second son's birth—tufts of black hair, rosebud mouth, wrinkly forehead. It was a difficult birth. In the middle of labor things had seemed wrong. Where was the heartbeat? Nevertheless he emerged safely. I remember the simplicity of that first love of mother and child. A magical closed circle; the miraculous sense of existing only for each other. I would rock and smooth his furrowed brow that already seemed so stressed with life, promising to love him forever. Even then I had a sense that God would teach me something special with this child.

**"In the middle of labor things
had seemed wrong. Where
was the heartbeat?"**



In the months that followed, a certain feeling of worry took hold of me. Colin was smaller than our first, quieter and more fragile. He reached all the milestones of babyhood, but always a little late.

Respiratory problems developed that never seemed to leave, resulting in heart surgery at age 4. During this crisis and beyond, the support of our church community was vital in helping my husband and I learn to surrender to God's mercy and grace.

School time was soon upon us, and I had a sense that Colin was not ready in terms of general concentration, speech development and small muscle coordination. The school principal was very supportive of our decision. "You know your child better than anyone," he said. Colin stayed home with his younger brother, David. I gave Colin educational activities and arranged for speech therapy.

The next September rolled by and Colin entered first grade. He was certainly overwhelmed, but this was not unusual for any of our children. They all tended to become transfixed when confronted with a new chaotic environment like a primary classroom. I remained optimistic.

Parent-teacher interviews came and went, revealing Colin's difficulty in making himself understood and in organizing himself and his belongings. When rudimentary math skills were taught, he was often left behind. His response to these problems was to remain quiet or to play distractedly with a pencil in his own world. During free times, his quiet demeanor and soft voice often left him observing rather than participating in games or conversation.

Last year Colin had a psychological assessment and while no particular learning disability was discovered, it was obvious that Colin had a problem. He had been born with some organizational and perceptual deficiencies that are likely always to affect his ability to manipulate concepts and to succeed in mathematics.

A kind of habitual anxiety descended on me that was not helpful to Colin or anyone else. I felt his hurt more keenly than I did the other children's. I wanted to shield him, to go before him and smooth the way. I feared for his future. My vision for his life had become clouded. I needed a new perspective.

I believe I am on the way to building one. I have certainly come to realize that I must continue to be involved in Colin's educational life. We spend a long time on homework, on going over math concepts covered in school. Writing a mystery story or a poem can take quite a long time. My challenge is to make this time fun for him so he can enjoy an insightful moment of understanding or a creative project completed. I have learned to be sensitive to when "enough is enough" for him. I have also learned patience.

In addition, I realize that I need to be an advocate for him at school. My husband and I both go to parent teacher interviews, and we try to come prepared. We need to communicate a sense of how he learns best and work out with the teacher appropriate goals for the future. This team approach is essential and avoids conflicting situations like the one we experienced last September where his teacher thought that Colin was "just not trying hard enough" to organize himself. This year, his teacher has been so encouraging, emphasizing the primary principal of learning—that a child learns best when he feels good about himself.

Secondly, I need to search for all the particular strengths the Lord has given to each of our children and to help them develop. I need to find out what Colin does well. What is he drawn to? Above all, I must be certain that it is his interest and not mine. I have noticed in Colin gentleness, sensitivity, compassion and vulnerability as well as a great joy in physical movement. I know these traits will be the foundation for his future. I need to nurture them.

Most importantly, I need to see Colin through God's eyes. I have had to acknowledge that God's hand was on Colin before he was born and that he was made according to God's plan: "Like an open book, you watched me grow from conception to birth; all the stages of my life were spread out before you. The days of my life all prepared before I'd even lived one day" (Psalm 139:13-15, *The Message*).

God has a future prepared for our son that is far more perfect than I could conceive. I must surrender my particular expectations for Colin to God. I need to

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relinquish my worry and concern to the Lord. I must become part of His will for Colin's life.

In his book, *The Pursuit of God*, A.W. Tozer says, "We are often hindered from giving up our treasures to the Lord out of fear for their safety. This is especially true when those treasures are loved ones and relatives. But we need have no such fears. Our Lord came not to destroy but to save. Everything is safe which we commit to Him, and nothing is safe which is not so committed."

It is a difficult thing always to live in this trusting way, yet through prayer and strength from the Word, my husband and I have renewed hope and faith. We are Colin's parents on this earth, but ultimately, God knows and loves Colin even more than either my husband or I could. God has counted every hair on Colin's head.

Thus, I will commit him to the Lord. The prophet Jeremiah speaks God's own assurance: "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jer. 29:11-13).

This assurance is for Colin, for me and for us all.



Marsha McDonald is a member of Cornerstone Community Church, a Mennonite Brethren church in Dartmouth, N.S. She is a Sunday school teacher and organizer for the women's ministry of the church. She is a full-time mother of four children (ages 9 to 25).

by Marilou Adams

Reading is Everything

I am a reading zealot. I grew up in a household where everyone read. We had bookshelves all over the house. When my dad learned how to use power tools, he spent most of his time building new bookcases. We had books on the mantel, books on the radiators, books on the desk, books on the dining room table . . . you get the picture. I have memories of my folks and aunt playing Scrabble. One game could last hours because they all would bring their latest book to the game board, and read while they waited for their turns.

I married a reader. When a friend remarked about how well-read my husband, Ron, is he replied, "But that's all I do. I have no other hobbies. I read." He has more volumes than the Manheim Public Library. My relatives no longer search for sweaters or bathrobes for him. They automatically, without consulting me, buy him a gift certificate to his favorite bookstore. When we moved (our realtor advised us to get rid of a few bookcases—they made the house look cluttered and dark—we wanted airy and light to sell), the first thing to be assembled in the new house was a bookcase, completely filled, in our bedroom—before the bed was set up.

Reading in Utero

My husband dreamed up the Reading in Utero program. When our friends in seminary became the first of our set to become pregnant, Ron thought it would be a great way to finance our way through school by marketing a series of tapes of classic books to uptight competitive Yuppies. You'd have a special headset to plug into the tape recorder that would wrap around a pregnant form "thereby exposing your child, even before birth, to stimuli that would advance his educational status!"

I remember meeting a friend a few months after our first child, Danny, was born and blurting out to her, "But what if Danny doesn't like to read?!" Is this a reasonable concern for a parent of a 3-month-old?



Reading aloud

My mother read aloud to my brother and me until I was a teenager. She read in the car on our long summer drives to Arkansas, but she also read regularly before our bedtime. Ron reads aloud to me when my hands are busy, but not my head—while I'm canning or knitting.

Our public radio station had a program, "Reading Aloud," to which we were all addicted at one book or another. I remember being regularly four minutes late to music class in college because I had been sitting in the car listening to *Vanity Fair*.

Reading modeled

I am a reader because reading was modeled for me. I imitated the people who mattered to me, who were most influential in my life. And because I read well and loved to read, I was a top student throughout school. I graduated with honors from college, getting high grades on papers and comments about my exceptional writing ability.

I am a teacher, and half of our day is spent learning how to read. My best students are children who are decent readers, and the vast majority of those kids have parents who read to and with them regularly. My husband, the reader, graduated from a prestigious college with honors. He went on to a New England seminary that felt it was competing with Harvard, Andover Newton and Boston College, and so the assigned reading load was usually 500 pages more than those schools. He graduated magna cum laude. He always wins at Trivial Pursuit.

The best thing for your child

Reading is everything. If you can read, so many things are open to you. The best thing you can do for your child is to encourage a love for and a fluency in reading. If you really want to educate your child, put away the flash cards and the "Hooked on Phonics" and the worksheets you can pick up at the drugstore. Instead, pick up a card at your public library and commit yourself to reading with her 15 minutes every day.

"I have memories of my folks and aunt playing Scrabble. One game could last hours because they each would bring the latest book with which they were involved to the game board, and each would read while the others calculated the best word score he could make with the tiles on his rack."

Good literature exposes us to voices and vocabulary, ideas and nuances, positions and emotions, situations that we may not encounter in the flesh. If it does this for us as adults, think what it can do for children whose experiences are so much more limited than ours.

Jim Trelease, author of *The Read-Aloud Handbook* and a strong advocate of reading aloud, claims that reading to your child a mere 15 minutes every day will increase your child's success in school significantly. He bases that modest proposal on a report issued by the National Academy of Education and the National Institute of Education which studied 20 years worth of research on reading methods and practices.

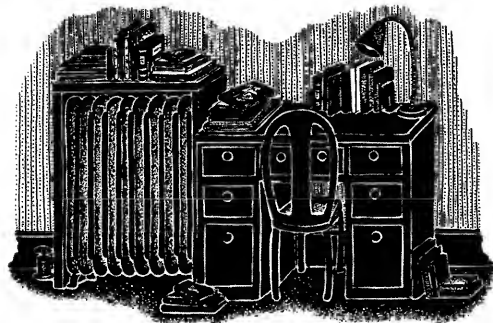
By reading aloud to/with your children, you:

- give them a model of a fluent, experienced reader.
- show them that reading is important.
- enrich their vocabularies.
- broaden their social, emotional, geographic experiences.
- stimulate their imaginations.
- stretch their attention spans.
- improve listening comprehension.
- provide them with new information.
- help establish the link between reading and writing.
- spend a predictable time each day together (I hope in close physical proximity, cuddling, touching in some way).

Adult readers benefit

A number of years ago I spent some time helping adults prepare to take their GEDs. We used practice tests that were supposed to be exactly like the real tests. More than one-third of the entire GED was labeled "Reading," and it was split into sub-tests—vocabulary, comprehension, grammar, spelling, etc. Another third was math, and the rest were smaller tests labeled "Science," "Geography," "History," etc. Those tests consisted of brief articles (one or two pages) followed by several pages of questions. I was struck with the realization that you really didn't have

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to have any science knowledge memorized to pass the science test. All the information to answer the questions was in the article previous to the questions. If you could read with understanding, you could pass that test—you didn't have to remember from high school science that water was H₂O or that Pluto is the farthest planet out. The information you needed was there. You just had to be able to read it. So the test really wasn't testing science knowledge. It was testing how well you read.

I'll say it again: Reading is everything. If you can read, the world is open to you. The best thing you can do for your child is to encourage a love for and a fluency in reading. If you really want to educate your child, if you want her to develop a love for learning that will last a lifetime, if you want her to have that curiosity and interest that makes her an interesting and intelligent human being, you will read.

Don't know what books to choose? The following books have suggestions:

The Read-Aloud Handbook by Jim Trelease. Penguin Books, 1982.

Reading for the Love of It by Michele Landsberg. Prentice Hall Press, 1986.

Written for Children by John Rowe Townsend. HarperTrophy, 1965.

Also, ask librarians. Any librarian worth her salt will be falling all over herself to provide you with at least 47 books that she thinks every child should know.

Marilou Adams has been an elementary school teacher for 13 years. She's been reading for 32. She and her husband began reading aloud to their first son the night after they came home from the hospital. They attend Community Mennonite Church of Lancaster, Pa.

Paulette Bulger, living Cold Lake, Alberta, sent the following poems about mother and child educating one another.

Anonymous

When You Thought I Wasn't Looking

When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw you hang my first painting on the refrigerator, and I wanted to paint another one.

When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw you feed a stray cat, and I thought it was good to be kind to animals.

When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw you make my favorite cake for me, and I knew that little things are special things.

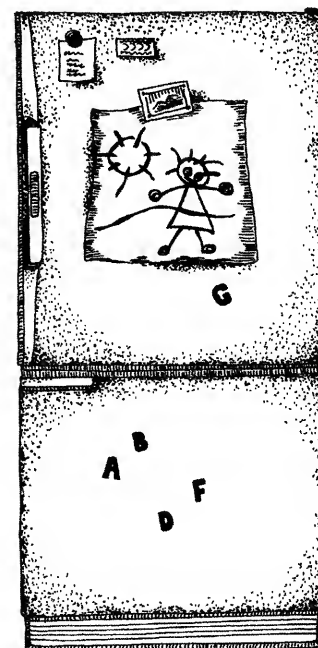
When you thought I wasn't looking, I heard you say a prayer, and I believed there is a God I could always talk to.

When you thought I wasn't looking, I felt you kiss me goodnight, and I felt loved.

When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw tears come from your eyes, and I learned that sometimes things hurt, but it's all right to cry.

When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw that you cared and I wanted to be everything that I could be.

When you thought I wasn't looking, I looked . . . and wanted to say thanks for all the things I saw when you thought I wasn't looking.





by Susan Marie

I Cried Out To God

I cried out to God
Show Me Your Face
And God sent me a child

I learned about surrender
As I gave way to the surges of birthing energy
I learned compassion
As my little one's cry pierced my heart
I learned powerlessness
As I laid awake with my inconsolable infant
I learned faithfulness
Rocking my feverish baby day and night waiting for
healing
I learned patience
As my child asked me to do it again just one more time
I learned a fierceness in love
That could take me to death to defend my sweet child
I learned tolerance
Accepting myself enough to love my child in a fit of
tantrum
I learned kindness
As my tears were kissed away by tiny lips
I learned respect
As I wondered at the profound wisdom of one so small
I learned humility
Seeing the Divine in the eyes of my child

God answered my cry
Know Who I Am
As you love your child
So it is that I love you

Letters

Women's Concerns Report welcomes your comments. Letters to the editor may be edited for length and clarity.

I would like to subscribe to your magazine. Your Jan-Feb '98 (Humor) edition was wonderful. I borrowed it from the church library.

—Lois Owen, Surrey, B.C.

I enjoy *Women's Concerns Report* very much, but I would prefer more in-depth theological articles and Bible interpretations from women's perspectives. It has been therapeutic to look at ourselves and our hurts but I would also like a nurture of intellect and heavier thought. Thank you for the good work.

—Anne Berg, Rosenfeld, Mb.

I love it! Read every word. Keep up the good work! I think I've gotten it practically since its beginning, and I've saved most of the issues.

—Suzanne Stauffer, Stone Creek, Ohio.

I want to say how much I enjoyed compiling the issue on redefining, renaming and reclaiming symbols. It was a real education for me. I have also heard from the writers of the other articles their appreciation of the writing experience. I would encourage the readership to offer their services of compiling or writing for the *Report* for those who want to grow from the discipline of writing.

I also want to share one disappointment. All of the articles written and submitted on any symbol were printed in the November/December '97 issue except one. That was an article written by friends of mine, a lesbian couple, who wrote of their redefining of the marriage symbols which were reflected in their own commitment ceremony.

I thought MCC was a place where diversity is celebrated, where the voiceless are given a voice, where we work for peace and justice. I was sadly mistaken. MCC, like a reflection of the Mennonite Church at large, is more willing to work at peace than at justice, because justice is too costly.

—Rhoda Stoesz, Goshen, Ind.

by Amy Dueckman

Mother as a teacher: A lifetime of learning

A man I know went in to see his child's teacher recently. His son had not mastered a lesson, and the father rebuked the teacher for not conveying the concepts so his son could understand them. "Teaching is not my job, it's yours," was the father's message. "You're the teacher, and it's up to you to make sure he gets this through his head! If he doesn't learn, it's your fault!"

As a mother of three school-age children, I find this philosophy impossible to understand. Teaching is my job! The public school teachers may have our children for six hours a day, but as parents, my husband and I are their teachers every hour and every day.

A high value on education

Education has always been very important to me. From the earliest time I can remember, it was obvious that my family placed a high value on education in general, and on doing well in school and making good grades. I never questioned that after high school I would go to college; to me this was the normal flow of life. And in the academic community of the college-associated church where I grew up, it was the norm.

After I married and joined my husband's church where relatively few people have studied beyond high school, I was once asked why I had gone to college. I didn't know what to say! No one had ever asked me that before, and I hadn't really thought about why I went beyond the obvious "to get an education." I decided my decision went back to my parents: They placed a high value on education, they conveyed that to me, and so I too came to value education.

Home: A place of learning

Parental attitudes regarding education cannot help but affect children. How well I remember grade school science and social studies reports! My parents always knew what



project I had going and took great interest in helping me with it if necessary. Mother, a former teacher, knew what teachers looked for and emphasized that "neatness and first impressions count." No strike-outs, paper smudges or sloppy handwriting for me! I took pride that my reports were handed in with appropriate illustrations, colored folders for covers and even rub-on letters for the title pages, for that professional look. High marks on my papers, along with satisfaction in a job well done, were my reward.

So the progression went: My parents took interest and encouraged me in my schoolwork; I gained confidence and took pride in my studies; I did well in school and earned good grades; I realized that school was important and enjoyed it; education became valuable to me as well.

But my education was not limited to the classroom. My home was a place of learning. Close proximity of work and school allowed our family of four to eat all three meals together every day, and often I gained insights and knowledge from interesting conversation around the table. This expanded my vocabulary; if a word was used that I didn't know, I asked what it meant. Never did I get the impression that my questions were troublesome or annoying to my parents; they always had time to answer or make me think of the answers myself.

Learning, then, was a constant process not limited to school hours. I learned history and geography as we traveled and did sightseeing on summer trips. I learned to

Women in Ministry

Adonna Nissley began an interim pastorate at Beldor Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, Va.

Lois Kaufmann was licensed and installed as a member of the pastoral team at Assembly Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind.

Stacey Ropp began as minister of youth and **Hazel Shirk** began as minister of special care at Bayshore Mennonite Church, Sarasota, Fla.

cook by watching and helping my mother in the kitchen. I learned about the world by watching TV news, listening to my parents discuss current events, visiting the library and reading periodicals that came into our home. By watching how my parents lived their lives day to day, I learned what they considered important. Their faith became my faith, and I internalized their values as my own.

Teachable moments every day

Now I am a parent, and I have become the teacher. Though for some people this means being totally in charge of education through home schooling, my husband, Wayne, and I never considered this option. We both recall our public school experiences as good ones. I would rather leave the academic subjects to be taught by the professionals who have methods and resources that I do not. And frankly I wouldn't want to be with my children 24 hours a day; the space apart for a few hours each day is good for all of us.

But I do love teaching my children, and I find teachable moments every day. Wayne and I both enjoy history and often watch historical movies or documentaries on television. These may spark a question, and we can give a quick lesson about the attack on Adolf Hitler, the assassination of John F. Kennedy or the bombing of Pearl Harbor. When the movie "Anastasia" was released in theaters, I was able to tell the children that there really was a Russian princess named Anastasia, and I talked about the Russian Revolution and the tragic end of Czar Nicholas II and his family.

I bring out maps so that the children will learn geography. In preparation for an upcoming trip, we use the atlas to show which cities we'd be going through and how long it would take to get there. In reading the "Little House" series of books by Laura Ingalls Wilder, we have consulted maps to trace the family's travels.

I've always found language fascinating, and I try to convey that to my children. Our oldest son is learning French in school, and was interested to learn that counting *un, deux, trois, quatre, cinq* is very similar to the *uno, dos, tres, cuatro, cinco* I counted when I was studying Spanish. I explained that they are both Romance languages which evolved from Latin, and that several other languages are related as well.

I also like to encourage the children to figure out words by using a few basic root words (such as tele, auto, bio, phono, photo, graph). I am always glad to answer if asked what a word means, or we look it up together in the dictionary.

There are the countless other things that we might take for granted but still must be taught to children: how to follow the music in a hymnbook, how to set a table properly, how to express gratitude, how to be considerate of other people's feelings. This is what parenthood is all about.

I don't know if the children are even aware that they are getting mini-lessons in these subjects, but I hope they find these learning times fun, however they come about.

Recently our oldest son completed a project tracing his family tree and country of ancestral origin. I found myself getting as enthused about the project as if it were my own. I followed his progress from beginning to end, helped with resources I had on hand, and watched as his research, writing and drawing came together in a neat-looking presentation. It made me think of my parents' enthusiasm and encouragement for me and my own schoolwork years ago. It rubbed off, and it paid off.

Today, I hope I am conveying my love and enthusiasm for education so that my children will continue to be learners, not only in school but throughout their lives. As a mother, I am privileged to be part of this process.

Amy Dueckman, with husband, Wayne, and children James (10), Noel (8) and Laura (6), makes her home in Abbotsford, B.C., and proudly claims her roots in south-central Kansas. She attends Olivet Mennonite Church. She is a graduate of Bethel College with a degree in English. She plays violin in the local symphony and is a full-time mom who is a freelance writer as time and opportunity permit.

Educational resources

**Christian Internet sites for
"Women/Children/Education"**

Women Today International:
www.womentoday.org

**Children of the World
Character Club:**
www.character.com

**Christian Community
Network:** www.christcom.net

Learn@Home:
www.learnathome.com

Abba Christian Ministries:
cgonzz@ix.netcom.com

**About the Children's
Department:**
[home.earthlink.net~
dfreemansr/index.html](http://home.earthlink.net~dfreemansr/index.html)

**Dear Sister: A Webzine for
Christian Women:**
www.dearsister.com

**Mennonite Connections on
the World Wide Web:**
[www.personal.umich.edu/
~menno.html](http://www.personal.umich.edu/~menno.html)

by Katie Mumper

The mission field of public school

As an eighth grade student who has recently been re-introduced to the public school system after being homeschooled, I've been asked by many people what factors were behind my parents' decision to homeschool and my decision to attend public school.

Homeschool begins

My parents started their homeschooling "career" with me, the eldest of five children. When the time came for me to start my formal education they decided I would be bored in school since I was already reading at a second grade level. They also wanted to be able to bring me up in a "religious" setting.

As I look back I'm very glad that they made this decision. Being homeschooled gave me a firm foundation in Christ that I am now using to stand strong in different situations at public school, at home and in church.

Bored in public school

When I was in second grade I decided I wanted to see what public school was like. I don't remember a whole lot about that year but I decided that public school just wasn't for me. I guess that in a way I was bored with school. It was very different from what I was used to. At home if we finished all our morning work before lunch we could read, watch Reading Rainbow or even take a nap. In public school if you got done before everyone else you got extra work to do or you sat around doing nothing until everyone else was done. In other words, at home you could work at your own pace and be rewarded while in public school you worked at the pace of everyone else so you wouldn't have more to do.

Back home

So I returned to my classroom at home for third, fourth and fifth grade. I could set my own lessons and learn new things instead of repeating lessons. Plus I had time to use my imagination to write stories and plays for me and my siblings to perform. One year, while studying the Pilgrims, Abby and Beth (the next two kids in our family) and I wrote and performed a puppet show about the sailing, landing and first year in America for the Pilgrims. Activities like this made me develop my imagination and helped me learn by doing.

Teachers make a difference

Then came the 1995-1996 school year when I decided to attend public school again to see what middle school was like. This experience was both good and bad.

There were 33 kids in my class, which meant there were just barely enough books and desks for everyone. There were quite a few of the obnoxious "step-on-everybody-to-build-myself-up" kind of kids. But there were also a few very nice people in my class, and I quickly made new friends and rekindled old friendships.

I also made new friendships with some of my teachers. Ms. Miller was my gym teacher who appreciated the fact that I wasn't to the stage of "I don't want to take gym in front of the boys" yet. I liked Mrs. Knepper, my math teacher, who even gave me math books when I left and Ms. Holmes, my reading teacher, who was very much a kid at heart. I also enjoyed Mrs. Huff, my social studies teacher. Most of all I appreciated Mrs. Slayton, the advisor of the gifted program, who challenged me more than anyone but my mom.

Scoring an A on a pretest of the material meant skipping language arts classes to write and draw for contests, getting the chance to enter many writing contests, winning a few, and participating in Academic Bowl, Thinking Caps, and other academic contests. Participating in the sixth grade gifted program helped me through the dull "I already know this" parts of classes. The program challenged me, and that kept me from being bored during the year.

But I eventually decided that, even with the challenges and friends, the cons of public school, the repeat material,

**A Wise Steward's
Homeschool:**
[home.sprynet.com/sprynet/
WiseStewards/](http://home.sprynet.com/sprynet/WiseStewards/)

Christian Homeschool Forum:
www.gocin.com/Homeschool/

*There are also groups of
women who meet around our
countries praying for our
schools, teachers and
children. You may want to
look for one or start one in
your area. These are the
names of two I know of:*

Moms In Touch International:
[www.europa.com/~philhow/
moms in touch.html](http://www.europa.com/~philhow/moms%20in%20touch.html)
phone: 1-800-949-MOMS

Mothers Who Care (a ministry
of Campus Crusade for Christ,
Canada) Email: [mothers@
ccc-van.crusade.org](mailto:mothers@ccc-van.crusade.org)
phone 604-514-2000

**Gateway Community Church
(MB)** in Lower Sackville, N.S.
has started a 15-minute,
Monday morning, prayer time
at their elementary school.
You don't have to be part of a
national organization to pray!



the bullies and some not so nice teachers, outweighed the pros, and I returned to homeschool.

A change of heart

Then, during my seventh grade year I had a real change of heart. One night our youth group had a guest speaker named Keith Spencer. He talked about Christ coming again and our generation's need to stand up and reach out to others and lead them to God. His talk relit a fire in my heart that was dwindling down to nothing. Then I decided that it was time to go back to the mission field of public school. I wasn't sure if my parents were going to let me go back after just one year of homeschool, but when I told them why I wanted to go back they agreed to let me go.

My mission field

So this year I am spending my eighth grade year back at New Cumberland Middle School. And I plan to stay in public school until I graduate. I've found out that some of my friends are Christians who are starting a Bible club at our school soon. I knew them in sixth grade but I didn't know they were Christians. I'm going to help them with the club, and I hope we can get most of our school to become part of God's family.

I'm also in a much smaller class this year with only one other person that I was friends with before. She and I have become closer since the beginning of the school year, and I'm making new friends with others in my class, too. There are just a few obnoxious people in my class, and I feel more comfortable with who I am than I did in sixth grade.

I'm still in the special interest program and Mrs. Slayton still pushes me to do my best and so do many of my teachers who know that I have a great amount of potential. Many are surprised when I'm not "up to par" with my work and they tell me. And I appreciate the fact that they think I'm mature enough to be told first and not my parents. This way I know what they expect of me, and I do my best to reach that expectation, if it's not too high. That's one area where I am grateful to my mom because she had high expectations of me and helped me to reach them.

Appreciating family more than ever

Many people wonder how my being in public school, as well as my sixth grade sister, while my mom homeschools the rest of the kids, has affected our family. When we were all homeschooled it seemed that we were at each other all the time. Now that I'm away from home for seven hours of the day I appreciate my siblings and my mom more than ever. I'm closer to my mom than most of my friends are with their moms. That is a result of being homeschooled by her. My sister, Abby, has most of the same teachers I did, and she asks me about how to deal with them and how to deal with kids in her class, and that has brought us much closer.

Neither form of education is the best for everyone. Some people need to stay at home all day and learn from their parents; others need to have the atmosphere of public school to learn. It all depends on your personality and your learning needs. All in all I can't decide which is better, homeschooling or public school, but I know that both have taught me well.

Katherine Mumper is 13 years old. She is in Grade 8 at New Cumberland Middle School. She attends Harrisburg Brethren in Christ Church where she is active in her youth group and Bible quizzing. She enjoys writing, soccer, ice skating and ballet.

WOMEN'S CONCERNS REPORT is published bimonthly by the MCC Committees on Women's Concerns. We believe that Jesus Christ teaches equality of all persons. By sharing information and ideas, the committees strive to promote new relationships and corresponding supporting structures through which women and men can grow toward wholeness and mutuality. Articles and views presented in REPORT do not necessarily reflect official positions of the Committees on Women's Concerns.

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News and Verbs

The fourth **Women Doing Theology** conference will be held June 25-27, 1998, on the campus of Bethel College, North Newton, Kan. The conference is sponsored by the Women's Concerns Office of Mennonite Central Committee U.S. and Kansas Mennonite Women in Ministry. Theme is "Journey Toward Healing." Conference presenters include Wilma Ann Bailey, Lois Barrett and Elizabeth Soto. For more information, contact Gwen Groff, MCC U.S. Women's Concerns Coordinator, P.O. Box 500, Akron, PA 17501-0500, (717) 859-3889, e-mail gmg@mccus.org.

A new MCC publication *Piecework: a Women's Peace Theology* is available. *Piecework* is a conversation with seven feminist Mennonite women about peace, God, the heart struggles of our lives and many things in between. For more information contact MCC Canada or call toll free 1-888-622-6337.

Oracle of the Heart, selected poems by Muriel T. Stackley, illustrated by Lynette Schroeder Wiebe, is available from Wordsworth, 702 NE 24th Street, Newton, KS 67114-9275. The book is divided into seven sections: Searching, Loving, Pondering, Parenting, Celebrating, Grieving, and Worshiping. Stackley is pastor of Bergthal Mennonite Church, near Pawnee Rock, KS, and former editor of *The Mennonite*. Schroeder Wiebe is administrative assistant for the Conference of Mennonites in Canada. Available now, \$9.95 US, plus postage.



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